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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Terry Goddard Appointing New Panel to Assist State Crime Labs

(Phoenix, Ariz. – Nov. 20, 2007) Citing major advances in crime-solving DNA technology, Attorney General Terry Goddard announced today he is forming a new state panel to coordinate and support work at Arizona's eight crime labs.

The Forensic Services Advisory Committee will monitor performance measures, develop a more uniform system of reporting data and work with laboratory directors to coordinate long-term planning.

"We have seen extraordinary advances in DNA evidence and forensic science over the past several years," Goddard said. "These improvements have created a need to do more to ensure that our crime labs stay in the forefront of this new technology."

Spending for forensic services at the state's crime labs has increased significantly in recent years and now totals more than $25 million annually.

Ron Reinstein, a former Maricopa County Superior Court Judge and nationally prominent DNA expert, has agreed to chair the Advisory Committee. Reinstein now works for the Arizona Supreme Court as Director of its newly established Center for Evidence Based Sentencing.

Goddard convened a statewide DNA and Forensic Technology Task Force in 2004 to review concerns raised in previous audits of state and local crime labs, including backlogs and funding problems. The Task Force was comprised of representatives from state and city crime labs, the Maricopa County Medical Examiner's Office, local law enforcement, members of the prosecution and defense legal communities, the courts, and victims' rights groups. There are eight full-service forensic laboratories in Arizona, all of which are accredited.

The Task Force recommended further review of the following issues:

- **Interagency Cooperation:** The equipment used in forensic science, and specifically DNA processing, is increasingly sophisticated and costly. The higher costs, coupled with an increased capability to evaluate smaller evidence samples, have heightened the need for cooperation among the various labs. There is currently a patchwork system of DNA processing in which procedures vary from city to city and agency to agency.

- **Coordinate Funding Requests:** The current framework results in labs competing against one another for federal funding. Federal grant monies for forensic science labs are increasingly tied

to statewide requirements for processing DNA and preserving biological evidence. The Advisory Committee will work with the various labs and the Arizona Legislature to take steps needed to ensure compliance with federal mandates tied to grant funding.

- **Create Performance Measures:** In the past, the state's labs have used different performance measures and different methods for assessing case backlogs. Greater uniformity is necessary to measure results and provide documentation necessary to qualify for available grants. More uniformity would also help ensure that grant monies are well-spent and strengthen lab funding requests.

- **Backlog Reduction:** Case backlogs reflect pending investigations involving DNA evidence that has yet to be analyzed and entered into state and national DNA databases. Backlogs hinder investigations, particularly in cases in which there is no known suspect, because laboratories must prioritize their work and give cases scheduled for trial first priority.

DNA evidence has proved decisive in a number of Arizona criminal cases. One of the most prominent is the exoneration of Ray Krone. He was initially convicted of killing a young woman in Phoenix in 1991 and sentenced to death, but his sentence was later reduced to life in prison. He was exonerated 11 years later on evidence from improved DNA technology not available at the time of trial. DNA not only exonerated Krone, it linked another man, Kenneth Phillips, to the murder for which Krone had been convicted. Phillips subsequently pleaded guilty to first-degree murder and was sentenced to life in prison.

The first criminal case in the United States to use plant DNA typing to gain legal acceptance involved a 1992 Maricopa County homicide. A woman's body was found under a Palo Verde tree in the desert. Officers found a beeper near the body and eventually traced it to a suspect, Mark Bogan. A few seed pods from a Palo Verde tree were found in the back of Bogan's truck. After analyzing the pods found in the truck and a small population of other Palo Verde trees, a University of Arizona scientist determined that band patterns among individual Palo Verde trees are unique and tied the pods in the truck to the tree near the victim's body. The scientist's testimony helped bring a murder conviction against Bogan, who is serving a life sentence.

The proposed Advisory Committee would serve under the Arizona Attorney General's Office with support from the Arizona Criminal Justice Commission.

A copy of the report and a list of task force members are attached.

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